

THE BEGINNING OF SECURITY

Mapping Out the Battlefield

I call as my heart grows faint,
 lead me to the rock that is higher than I.
For you have been my refuge,
 a strong tower against the foe.

Psalm 61:2

...God is so vastly wonderful, so utterly and completely delightful that He can, without anything other than Himself, meet and overflow the deepest demands of our total nature, mysterious and deep as that nature is.

— A. W. Tozer

I PAUSED AT THE FRONT DOOR AND TOOK A DEEP BREATH. THE usually quiet stretch of street in front of the small brick home I grew up in was filled with cars. I pushed open the front door and walked into a living room full of people both young and old. Upon my entrance, everyone seemed to simultaneously breathe in, looking at me solemnly. Some I knew; others were complete strangers to me. The whole scene seemed surreal, like time was playing some sort of cruel trick on me. My mother came rushing over. She flung her arms around my neck and started sobbing into my shoulder as everyone looked on.

“Oh, Robin, thank God you’re here... Did your dad tell you everything? I still can’t believe it... How are you doing, honey?”

Oddly enough, embarrassment was the only emotion that I

could summon. I mumbled a few awkward expressions of sorrow. Certainly, I had grieved when I first heard the news. My husband, Dave, and I had moved to downtown Indianapolis and were lying on the just-filled waterbed when a phone call came from an old boyfriend, who I hadn't talked to in many years. He immediately told me that my family was frantically trying to contact me.

A phone call to my father yielded the tragic news. My sister Jennifer had been in a freak automobile accident involving freezing rain and a sixteen-year-old who had been driving a truck with a winch on the front. My sister had stopped at a stop sign and rolled down the window trying to see. She ventured out into the intersection just as the truck flew over a hill. The teenager panicked, and the winch on the front of his truck caught my sister in the back of the neck, killing her instantly.

She was just a few weeks shy of turning twenty-one.

After I got off the phone, I lay on the bed crying while my husband tried to comfort me. I had just seen my sister several months earlier when I was home for Christmas. We had promised each other some extended time to talk, but she was spending lots of time with her boyfriend. Before she hurried out the door the last time I saw her, she gave me a big hug, told me she loved me, and assured me that we would find more time later to catch up. Now I knew that time would never come.

I brushed away my tears and pulled myself together. There were arrangements to be made. I had to get to Virginia as soon as possible. And as I closed my suitcase and rode to the airport, something inside of me closed as well. When my family all stood in a circle, wrapped their arms around each other and wept, I couldn't separate what I was feeling from what I thought I should be feeling. I was used to being the pillar of strength in the family—the spiritual one who was supposed to comfort everybody else.

What didn't occur to me, though, was that I needed the funeral for myself—I needed time to grieve the loss I had just suffered. And so I found ways to stay on the perimeter, letting out just enough sorrow to stay engaged but not enough to heal, outwardly giving the illusion of being strong, inwardly feeling weak.

Unknowingly, I had been transported back to a key moment in my childhood. I was lying on the bottom bunk of my bed while listening to my two little sisters crying. My parents were arguing in the other room, screaming words at each other that no child ought to hear and throwing things at each other. I willed myself not to cry, biting my bottom lip. Somebody had to be strong. At least that's what I told myself. In reality I was hiding behind a wall of strength. I was willing myself not to be hurt by what was going on around me. At a tender eleven years old, I was already well trained in my role as the oldest daughter. I had already developed codependent coping mechanisms that I would carry with me into adulthood.

And now, twenty-four years later, I was feeling more than a little disappointed with myself. I yearned to be more like my mother in her grief—vulnerable, courageous and unashamed. But I simply wasn't secure enough to be vulnerable in the most difficult test I had faced yet in life. As a Christian, a committed follower of Christ, I knew that Jesus had wept openly at the death of his friend Lazarus. I wanted to be like him, to grieve with others—my mother, my brothers and sisters, and even the people from my childhood who had gathered to support my family—but I couldn't.

When I returned to Indianapolis, I didn't let anyone else in either—even my brothers and sisters in Christ who sincerely wanted to minister to me. With nowhere else to go, that sorrow got shoved back deep into my heart. I didn't know how to find my way through it, so instead I found my way around it.

Seeking Security

Sad, too, is the love that has no communion with those we love when they suffer. How miserable it is to have to stand in mute sorrow with nothing to say to those we love when they are in great pain. It is a terrible confession that our love is not big enough to surmount suffering.¹

It wasn't long after my sister's funeral that I asked God to create something new in me. A new heart. A secure heart. Later, at a missions conference in the Philippines, a women's ministry leader from Russia, inspired by our discussion of insecurity, challenged me to write a book on insecurity. "We all need this," she said in her sketchy English. "God wants you to write this book."

They say you shouldn't ask God for what you really don't want because he might just give it to you. I did so much want to be secure. I wanted to be secure enough to be vulnerable with my heartaches, my fears and especially with my own private suffering. I was inspired by the thought of being able to help other women as well. And, I sensed that all of this would take a bigger love for God. But as much as I desperately yearned to be secure, I had no idea what I was really asking for. As it turns out, before I could move toward security, God had a lot more work to do in my heart. And Satan certainly wasn't ready to let go of the stronghold he had built in my heart.

In the couple of years that followed, Satan unleashed a full-fledged attack on my security. When the church Dave and I were serving full-time came into a time of struggle, I took it on my own shoulders. *Since the church is struggling that must mean that I'm struggling.* My attempts to please everybody were dividing my heart and separating me from my faith. When a well-meaning friend suggested that my pride was at fault, I took it to the nth degree, taking some of the most challenging scriptures and trying to bring myself to repentance. I started questioning whether I was even a Christian at all. I started talking about being "re-baptized."

1. Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2003), 86.

One day I had an emotional breakdown at a church leaders meeting. I was cracking. But the more others around me tried to help me, the worse I became. Eventually, out of fear for my mental health, we were asked to step down from the ministry, forcing my husband to give up his lifelong dream. I had hit the bottom.

But now I know that God in his abundant mercy was actually protecting me. He was preparing to do major surgery on my heart. I could no longer put off dealing with the way that I had grown up—with my dad's alcoholism and the accompanying verbal abuse.

Amazingly, just a couple of days after we stepped out of the ministry, my head began to clear. Thanks to my husband's encouragement, I read the book of 1 John and saw with certainty that I was a Christian. My salvation was secure. It was like a dark cloud had started its sojourn off my soul.

My husband and I made a major transition out of the full-time ministry into the secular world and job market. We moved to Chicago to try to transition and nearly went bankrupt. My husband eventually landed a job downstate in Bloomington, Illinois. We were broke and humbled, but ready to turn a new chapter in our lives. And for me, I knew that turning that chapter meant somehow figuring out the causes of the insecurity that seemed to chase me in every corner of my life. And my hope was that if I could figure out why I felt so swallowed up by insecurity, maybe I could help other women as well.

As I began to open up more and more about my insecurity, I didn't find shame. Instead, I found kindred souls. I began to understand more and more that this wasn't my battle to face alone. As I risked letting my insecurities out in all of their unkemptness, I made some of the best friends of my life. With their help, I engaged the battle. Somehow, acknowledging the depth of my insecurities didn't make other women look down on me. Rather, they felt they could trust me with theirs as well. And

through that I bonded with another woman who was to become one of my best friends—Andrea. Together, over the last ten years, we’ve fought together and held up each other’s arms in our own individual battles to be secure. Graciously, she’s agreed to let you into her battle as well.

Andrea’s story highlights an important truth about insecurity. Andrea didn’t grow up with physical abuse or some dramatic story of trauma. Yet her father’s inability to connect with her emotionally from the time she was a little girl combined with her mother’s death at the age of fourteen created emotional deficits that she is still trying to understand. In this part of her story, she shares about how a childhood incident started what eventually grew into a full-fledged insecurity in her heart.

Andrea’s Story—In Her Own Words

A few months ago, I became painfully aware that my reactions to hurt feelings, disappointments and conflict in my relationship with my husband were really unwarranted given the situation at hand. In other words, when my feelings were hurt, I overreacted, and my emotions seemed to skyrocket, fueled by memories from my past.

I remember that as a young girl if I had done something wrong or displayed any type of negative emotion or attitude, I was sent to my room. It didn’t seem to me to be a form of discipline for the wrong behavior, but rather a way to remove me and my “unacceptable” emotion from everyone else’s view. There was never any follow-up interaction or processing talk about the situation, just an understanding that I was not to come out until I had the right attitude.

Of course my dad never gave me any explanation as to what the right attitude should be. He only used phrases like... “*Don’t be that way,*” or “*That is an ugly way to be*” or “*Don’t come out until you are ready to be reasonable.*” What I felt didn’t seem to matter. Therefore, the message I heard was “*You do not matter.*”

I would sit in my room, hurt and feeling like no one cared, especially the people who were supposed to care for and love me. This, of course, would make me angry, and the only way that I knew to feel better was to plot some kind of revenge or behavior that would “pay them back” for how they made me feel. Of course, I could never carry out what I so wanted to do.

Once, I did pack my little suitcase and walk out the door. I only got as far as the end of the driveway because I was terrified of the dark. So I turned around and came home, even more angry and hurt because my parents didn’t seem at all phased. This was more proof to me that I didn’t matter, even though I was obviously crying out for confirmation that I did.

Anyway, those times in my room, alone, left me to process things on my own. And how accurate can a little girl be when trying to deal with all those emotions and trying to make the right conclusions about herself? What I concluded is that there is a right way to be and act, and I was at the mercy of the ones who “loved” me.

So now, as an adult, this has mostly exhibited itself in my relationship with my husband. When my feelings are hurt and then not validated or recognized to be reasonable, my childhood feelings come flooding in.

I start thinking, *“My feelings do not matter, therefore I don’t matter and I am not important. I have not met the standard, the right way to think and feel, so I just need to be sent away from this person.”* Then I become angry and start thinking of ways to pay back my husband when he hurts me.

I have said things to him like: *“If you don’t learn to give me what I need emotionally, I will have to find it from someone else.”* By communicating my hurt in the form of a threat, I try to make the problem him and not me. The anger is a defense to protect myself from hurt because being hurt confirms the message that I don’t matter. I withdraw and go into hiding. Instead of reaching

out (which is what I need), I stay isolated emotionally because of feeling isolated physically as a little girl. It's hard to forgive, hard to trust and hard to give my heart again.

This has impacted me not only in my relationship with my husband, but also in my overall insecurity. I constantly have to fight the idea that I must live up to a standard or expectation that is not spelled out, and consequently, I don't know what to shoot for. So, I live under a cloud of feeling that at any moment I will fail and be exposed and then be embarrassed and isolated.

I think this is why I am quiet in nature. I am always hanging back, searching for the acceptable behavior for a situation—not wanting to risk behaving different than anyone else. Of course, this makes me different and therefore ends up confirming the very thing I fear.

I guess the bottom line is that I have listened to the conclusions that I made as a little girl and have ended up following that blueprint for my life. I feel like I must be “sent away” whenever I feel I am saying or doing the wrong thing. I know I will never really measure up to anyone else, so I just count it as a victory if I don't get exposed.

What other people think about me becomes incredibly controlling, and I learn to show what I think is acceptable to them. Just now at forty-something, I am making progress on who I am and being okay with that.

Developing a Secure Heart

Like Andrea, each of us has our own unique story. But in my experience, all of our stories have common threads—childhood messages run amok, a fear of exposure and rejection, feeling unacceptable, isolating ourselves from others, willing ourselves to be strong, capable, confident or whatever else it is that we think we *should* be.

Now, Andrea is developing a battle-tested security—a security that comes from fleeing to God as her refuge. I hope you'll

agree that her vulnerability is inspiring! And I thank God that he's given me her friendship to help give me courage and strength!

How do we develop the kind of security that allows us to face our weakness head-on and engage it in spiritual warfare? How do we engage our insecurities without losing ourselves in them? I've found three keys that we'll talk about at length. These three keys are the boiled-down conclusion of years of battle to find a secure heart.

Building a Foundation for Security—Chapters 1–4

To understand security, we'll first take a look at the roots of insecurity—going back all the way to the Garden of Eden. Then we'll talk about how God reveals himself to us in the Bible through many names that show his personal and relational nature. When we know him and experience him in these specific ways, the result will be a growing trust and security.

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
Those who know your name will trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.
(Psalm 9:9–10)

Renouncing and Replacing Satan's False Securities— Chapters 5–11

Satan comes after us with a vision of secure life that is a flat-out lie, enticing us with false dreams and avenues of comfort that only lead us to a deeper insecurity. By renouncing his false securities, and replacing them with the knowledge of God, we can more clearly see the path to true security.

The idols speak deceit.
Diviners see visions that lie,
they tell dreams that are false.
They give comfort in vain.
Therefore the people wander like sheep
oppressed for lack of a shepherd. (Zechariah 10:2)

Walking Securely—Chapter 12

A security that comes from God's eternal and unchanging nature thrives even in times of darkness, even when facing death. And most of all, it is a personal security that comes from hearing him call your name and then experiencing his goodness firsthand.

"I will go before you
and will level the mountains;
I will break down gates of bronze
and cut through bars of iron.
I will give you the treasures of darkness,
riches stored in secret places,
so that you may know that I am the LORD,
the God of Israel, who summons you by name."
(Isaiah 45:2–3)

Circling Back

Just one year ago, some fifteen years after the death of my sister, I sat at another funeral—the memorial service for my mother. Right after the service ended, my sister Dona spontaneously walked over to Jennifer's grave, wiped off the marker with her hands and turned over the vase recessed into her headstone, tenderly clearing out the cobwebs and dust that had accumulated. She then walked over to my mother's grave and began picking some flowers out of the large silk arrangements. Following her example, the remaining children walked from arrangement to arrangement, carefully picking out flowers as well. We then walked one by one over to Jennifer's grave, knelt and tenderly added to the growing arrangement in the vase. Those who had come to the graveside silently circled around us.

Using Mom's flowers to honor Jennifer only seemed appropriate, since there wasn't a day in my mother's life that she did not mourn losing her next-to-youngest daughter. The only solace Mom found in facing death was her faith that she would be with Jennifer again.

Facing my mother's death had also brought me back to the death of my sister. Knowing the person I was when my sister died, I was more than a little afraid of facing the grieving process all over again. But tragedy can open your heart in unexpected ways, and through the six weeks that passed from my mom's cancer diagnosis to the day when I sat on her bed and watched as she departed this world with a slight smile on her lips, it became obvious that God had built in me a deeper security and trust in him.

As a result, I was able to share my grief with a wide assortment of people—weeping into the shoulders of nurses and social workers, opening my heart wide to those who gathered at my mother's funeral, and even allowing myself to be ministered to by strangers.

What made the difference in the way I handled the deaths of two of the most important people in my life? I now not only *knew* and *intellectually asserted* that God is my rock, I'd also *experienced* him as my fortress; I'd *trusted* him as my guide; I'd *leaned* on him as my anchor; and I'd *surrendered* to him as my refuge.

And this time, God ensured that I would be able to let the funeral meet my needs by sending two angels, two of my best friends, all the way to Virginia to stand by my side and make sure that I took the time necessary to grieve. Even though they barely knew each other and lived in different locales, they each independently decided to come. God flew them in on different airlines, and they arrived within an hour of each other so that they were delivered to my doorstep in one swoop, a giant kiss from God.

Right before the funeral, they took me aside and expressed their concern that I have time to grieve (yep, as you can imagine, as the oldest daughter I was arranging everything). They prayed with me and, quite honestly, changed my focus. In them I saw God as my protector—granting me exactly what I needed.

And so I came to the fiery trial of my mother's illness and death clinging to the only place, the only refuge, the only rock that could hold me steady amidst the roller-coaster ride—my relationship with God. This security of heart gave me the ability to choose to face my fear of vulnerability and weakness, and to be generous with my grief, seeing God in the midst of my pain.

But what had happened in the fifteen years between my sister's death and my mother's death? As you might guess, the growth that came wasn't because everything suddenly got easier—life's difficulties only got more and more challenging. What then, did those fifteen years bring?

Marital bliss? My husband's and my intertwined addiction/co-dependency progressed to the near break-up of our marriage. We then went through years of counseling.

Financial Ease? Our transition from ministry to "real" jobs (Dave had a degree in Biblical Greek and Hebrew) led to near financial disaster. The pinnacle was our family of five living with Dave's sister and her husband in their basement so we could mend financially.

Health and Beauty? An anaphylactic reaction to an allergy shot almost took my life. A severe bout with Grave's Disease changed my appearance and made my eyes severely swollen for more than five years.

Friends? Moving to Bloomington brought lonely years as I struggled to create new relationships. A later move to Chicago again brought another period of loneliness.

Strength? Getting rear-ended led to a slow-healing shoulder injury for which the other person's insurance refused to pay, leading to a lawsuit that ended in a settlement far below the medical bills amassed.

Church? Our church went through a crisis, which led to some dear friends leaving. Some women whom I had labored over and loved suddenly no longer wanted contact. They moved on, leaving me reeling.

Ministry? Later on, in a totally unrelated incident, a dear friend that I helped bring to Christ (and who had struggled for years with mental illness) committed suicide. Three different friends went through serious bouts with cancer. And another woman died just months after she stayed at my house.

God's Faithfulness

Although there have been setbacks in the last fifteen years, as I look at the big picture I see that God has stood beside me (and my husband), leading us from strength to strength. After re-entering the job market killing roaches and throwing newspapers, Dave eventually began a highly successful career in pharmaceutical sales and is now working on a master's degree in organizational psychology.

I also went through several career changes until I found my calling as a full-time writer. I was able to open my own business, and in spite of hardship, have had three highly successful years in business.

Our three children are finding their way into adulthood—our daughter just graduated from college, our oldest son will graduate soon. We were able to help plant a church in Bloomington, Illinois, that has now been in existence for more than ten years. We've seen friends and neighbors give their lives to God. Personally, my relationship with God has only grown richer, and my love and appreciation for my husband has deepened (we just celebrated twenty-five years of marriage). God's goodness has been abundant.

Would I have needed all these things in order to be secure? I hope not. I'm convinced that this security can stand no matter

what life throws at me. But I thank God that through much pain, he has refined my faith and proved it to be genuine.

During all of these years, I've kept a single goal. My single-hearted desire has been simple, and it still remains the same: I want to be *secure in heart*. Through the years, I've filled journals with my studies on security/insecurity, reading every book I could find that was even remotely connected to the topic. And even though sometimes I felt like I was barely making any progress at all, a beautiful thing was happening. Bit by bit, I was being transformed. I was getting more and more vulnerable in my relationship with God, and I was learning new ways to connect with him. And I was becoming more firmly committed to my dream that one day I would be able to help others.

Am I totally free from insecurity? Far from it. Insecurity is always there, taunting me, asking me to listen to its "wisdom." Although I know I'll see new areas of insecurity as I go along and continue to battle old ones, I feel hope and peace from God. This is what I've learned: Being secure isn't so much about banishing every little bit of insecurity from our lives. It's more about actively engaging in the battle. *By engaging in the battle, you are standing up and defending what has already been given to you—your security in God through Christ.*

Like Andrea, I think many of us are asking the question, "Do I matter?" And the funny thing is, many of us are not even aware that we are asking it. We pose the question unconsciously to the men in our lives—whether father, boyfriend, husband, brothers in Christ, or if we get desperate enough, to men who don't know us at all. We ask it when we get "dolled up," hoping someone might see something beautiful in us. We ask it in our careers and in trying to find our calling. We ask it as Christians to our brothers and sisters in God's church. We ask it in our approach to our roles as wives and mothers. We ask it when we go through hard times that pull the rug of security from under our feet. And most of all, we ask it to God!

Why else would we be so devastated when it seems like God isn't answering? Why else would something like the inability to lose weight, to find a boyfriend, to have good health, to pay the bills, to get pregnant, or to do well in school become a deep-seated spiritual issue that can knock us flat spiritually? I think it's because we're asking, in not so many words, "God, do you see what's going on down here with me? Do you care? Do I really matter? Or do you just want me to retreat to a little room, and only let me come out when my attitude is exactly like what you talk about in the Bible—spiritual enough, good enough?"

The truth is, dear sister, that you do matter! You matter because God says so. And although you may not see or feel the security that he gives you, it is still there. Like the old song goes, "Jesus loves me this I know. For the Bible tells me so." Now God is singing another song over you, telling you through scripture after scripture that you are secure. How can you know this? Because he says so. And because he says so, you can have peace—peace of heart.

Because God wants each of us to be absolutely sure of our heritage as his daughters, he has filled his word with analogies designed to help us understand exactly how he feels about you and me. And some of these seem to me to appeal almost exclusively to the heart of a woman.

But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me,
the LORD has forgotten me."
"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?
Though she may forget,
I will not forget you!
See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are ever before me." (Isaiah 49:14–16)

Ask any nursing mother what that scripture means, and she'll most likely get a little misty-eyed. When each of my three children

was nursing, they shared a common characteristic. They would often stroke my face and look directly into my eyes, as if trying to memorize my every feature. I can't even fathom forgetting them, or even worse being totally without feeling at their cries for help. When my child would cry out in hunger, I would feel the milk surge in my breast. My body, my heart—everything within me—moved toward that child. I can't even imagine having no compassion. (Nursing so impacted me that I still have dreams that I'm nursing a child—and my youngest is twenty-one!)

How does this apply to you? The truth is that it's more likely for you to forget an infant nursing at your breast than for God to forget you. It's more likely for you to have absolutely no compassion for the baby stroking your face, than it is for God to forget to have compassion for you. Even more than that, having compassion for you is such a part of his nature that it's like you're engraved on his hands. Every time he reaches a palm out, he sees you. And his heart is moved with love. Do you matter to him? Absolutely!

Security in heart is our most precious gift from God—the ultimate overflowing of his goodness to us. But because of its extreme value, it's a gift that must be battled for and protected. And knowing that, should it surprise us that security is the gift that Satan most wants to steal from us?

THE BEGINNING OF SECURITY: MAPPING OUT THE BATTLEFIELD

Personal Study Guide & Life Application

Security usually doesn't come from everything in life going well, but instead through trials and suffering. In Romans 8:10, Paul reminds us, "Our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us."

What challenges in your life tend to make you insecure? To map out your own personal battlefield, make a beginning list of areas in your life that have caused you insecurity in the past and present. Then read Romans 8:10. What does this scripture mean to you?